A Heart That Can Embrace Every Form: Spiritual Pluralism in the Poetry of Ibn ’Arabi

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In the vast ocean of Islamic mystical experience, Ibn ’Arabi emerges as both poet and philosopher, revealing the profound meaning of religious diversity through his lyrical symbols. One of his expressions in *Tarjuman al-Ashwaq* states:

> لَقَدْ صَارَ قَلْبِي قَابِلًا كُلَّ صُورَةٍ فَمَرْعًى لِلْغَزْلَانِ، وَدِيرٌ لِلرُّهْبَانِ وَبَيْتٌ لِلْأَوْثَانِ، وَكَعْبَةُ طَائِفٍ وَأَلْوَاحُ تَوْرَاةٍ، وَمُصْحَفُ قُرْآنٍ أَدِينُ بِدِينِ الْحُبِّ«1

This quote demonstrates a heart capable of embracing all forms of spiritual manifestation. In classical commentary, scholars and Sufi experts such as William Chittick emphasize that this poem expresses a mystical experience in which the lover (ʿāshiq) recognizes the presence of God in all created forms, rather than merely asserting doctrinal religious pluralism.2

The Heart as a Plural Space

The concept “my heart can embrace every form” implies that the human heart is a microcosm of spiritual pluralism. In literary terms, it is a metaphorical art: the heart becomes not just a biological organ but an expansive and elastic imaginative space, capable of containing diverse religious and aesthetic experiences. Philosophically, this aligns with the teaching of *wahdat al-wujud*, which asserts the unity of essence behind the diversity of phenomena.3

Love as a Universal Religion

The poem’s concluding phrase, “أَدِينُ بِدِينِ الْحُبِّ” (I follow the religion of Love), embodies Ibn ’Arabi’s Sufi philosophy. Love becomes a religion that transcends ritual and doctrine, where every form of religion is merely a manifestation of the caravan of God’s love. Chittick emphasizes that Divine love here is transcendent and universal, experienced spiritually rather than understood purely intellectually.4

Interreligious Symbolism

This poem also invites discussion across religions. Ibn ’Arabi places idols, the Ka’bah, monasteries, the Torah, and the Qur’an within the same framework of the heart. Corbin emphasizes that this symbolism is a tool to comprehend the unity of the Divine essence through different forms, not a claim of doctrinal equality.5

Criticism and Reservations

Some scholars caution against reading this poem literally as a justification for doctrinal pluralism.6 Critics argue that Sufi works should be understood within the context of Sharia, Tasawwuf, and Ma’rifah, rather than as popular literature.7

Conclusion

Quotes such as “My heart can embrace every form… I follow the religion of Love” should be interpreted within the Sufi and mystical experience context, as an expression of spiritual artistry and universal longing for God, rather than a doctrinal statement that all religions are equivalent. Nonetheless, in the contemporary context, this poem retains a powerful aesthetic and symbolic capacity to inspire tolerance, openness, and universal human compassion.

References

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